

## People &amp; Places

## Film

## 'I believe in risk'

## Redford on his quest for truth and freedom

LOS ANGELES, Dec 10, (RTRS): During a 90-minute onstage conversation at the Marrakech Film Festival, where he received an honorary tribute, **Robert Redford** spoke about his life-long quest for truth and freedom, and his political engagement through films, as well as a long-gestating project he's considering producing, despite having announced his retirement.

When he has spoken about the project, "109 East Palace", in the past, he said he would direct it, but now he is thinking of only producing. The story revolves around the rise and fall of the physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, who was hailed as an American hero when he created the atomic bomb in 1940, and was disgraced during the McCarthy era.

"109 East Palace" is an address in New Mexico where the atomic bomb was created, said Redford, who developed the script. "Oppenheimer was a hero, he invented the atomic bomb around 1940 and by 1945 they discovered that his background as a young person was communist, and because it was in the 1950s during the McCarthy period of our history everything was so extreme, right wing, so suddenly this guy who was a hero, (became) a villain and the congressmen went after him."

"It's a story about how things can change because of the political climate," said Redford. "It's a really, really interesting topic... and such as a great story but as I got closer to it, I thought maybe I shouldn't direct it and just produce it," he said.

Redford explained he felt conflicted about the idea of directing another film because he's already said he would retire. "Some part of me would like to direct it to control things... the other part says 'No, you said you didn't want to do that anymore so don't!'"

## Retirement

He also once again expressed regrets over announcing his retirement a couple years ago. "The only trouble with retiring is that you should never announce it... because then you have people running around and saying 'Oh, before you go could you just do this and do that.'"

Now that he has retired from film, Redford said he longed for "something fresh" in life. "Sketching and drawing felt fresh." He reminisced about his time as an artist in Paris before he became an actor.

He said his experience as an artist had made it "easier" for him to become a director. It all started when he came to France as a teenager to study art and struggled to make friends, which led him to use his "sketchbook as a companion". "I would sit in the bars and cafes and I would sketch people on the right side of the page and on the left side I would imagine what they were saying. And then I put the two together. That turned out to be very valuable for me later on when I became a director because I had that same point of view: Being on the outside looking in but also being able to go in to complete the picture," said Redford.

Redford also shared a few words of wisdom with the audience, which included film students, filmmakers and actors. "I believe in risk. I believe not taking a risk is a risk, it's the only way to move forward... If you don't take a risk, you will get stagnant and get stuck, but it's also important to study and look hard at why you are taking a risk," said Redford. The other advice Redford gave to everyone, actors included, was "to pay attention to the world and life around you" and "to the powers above you."

A dedicated activist involved in many issues, including the environment, Redford said that "art criticizes society, that's its role, it draws attention to what the truth is. It keeps us honest. Art is a critic of society. If society is moving this way or that way like during the Nixon years and the way things are now you need another point of view to create a balance."

"We are now living in dark times. I think it's obvious reading the news day to day. It feels that there is dark wind blowing through all the countries, and certainly in America it feels for me an especially dark time because I see some of our freedom that I cherish so much growing up threatened by over-powering ego people, one dimensional thinking, inexperienced people running things, people assuming power."

"I probably won't be able to get back into my country now," quipped Redford.

## Nostalgia

Looking back at his childhood in the 40s and 50s, Redford expressed nostalgia about the energy of people who were gathered together in America, who raised money, who sacrificed for the greater good which was to fight fascism in other parts of the world, and at that time it was Nazi Germany. We all came together and bonded in unison to contribute to an effort that would preserve our liberty" at the end of World War II. "It felt good to be together."

He said he also felt nostalgic about the "communal experience of time when you would walk into a theater, sit in the dark with other people and look at this big screen, feel the energy of the people around you" and now that's "pretty much gone."

Although the conversion didn't touch upon his collaboration with some of his best-known female co-stars such as Jane Fonda, Meryl Streep or Barbra Streisand, Redford was asked to name the directors who had the most impact on him: Sydney Pollack because of their "deep and lasting friendship," and George Roy Hill, who directed him and Paul Newman in "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" in 1969 and deserved to get more recognition than he did. The movie became an instant classic and established Redford as a star.

## Also:

**LOS ANGELES:** Moroccan director **Leila Kilani** presented the rough cut of her second feature film, "Joint Possession", in the post-production section of Marrakech Film Festival's Atlas Workshops. She spoke to Variety about the film, which she describes as a "war film, inside a family."

She began shooting "Joint Possession" in 2015 and the picture has evolved organically over the past four years.

Kilani views "Joint Possession" as an aesthetic and thematic departure – "more epic, more lyrical, a kind of Greek tragedy" – from "On the Edge", which she describes as having a monochromatic visual style, with an urban setting in Tangiers, and primarily revolving around the semi-anarchic young female characters. In 2011, it was considered to have a socially aware intrigue that reflected the spirit of the Arab spring.



Redford



Front row from left: 2019 Kennedy Center Honorees Michael Tilson Thomas, Linda Ronstadt, Sally Field, Joan Ganz Cooney and Lloyd Morrisett, (back row from left), Philip Bailey, Verdine White, Ralph Johnson and characters from "Sesame Street", Abby Cadabby, Big Bird and Elmo pose for a group photo following the Kennedy Center Honors State Department Dinner at the State Department on Dec 7 in Washington. (AP)



Singer Annie Lennox and musician Dave Stewart of The Eurythmics arrive at the 30th anniversary Rainforest Fund Benefit Concert at the Beacon Theatre on Dec 9 in New York. (AP)



Jungkook



Holland

## Variety

**CHICAGO:** A federal agent who was at a Chicago airport to search a private plane that rapper **Juice WRLD** and his entourage had arrived in administered the opioid antidote Narcan to the performer, who briefly woke up incoherent but later died, authorities said Monday.

The plane carrying the 21-year-old rapper, who was named top new artist at the 2019 Billboard Music Awards in May, and about a dozen other people landed at Midway International Airport at around 2 am Sunday. Federal agents and city police officers, acting on a tip that a private plane coming from **Los Angeles** to **Midway** was carrying guns and drugs, were waiting, Chicago police spokesman **Anthony Guglielmi** said Monday.

During a search in a private hangar, a drug-sniffing dog made a "positive alert" on luggage carts that were loaded with bags from the plane, Guglielmi said. Inside, they found multiple bags of suspected marijuana, several bottles of prescription cough syrup, three guns, metal-piercing bullets and a high-capacity ammunition magazine, he said.

The rapper, whose real name was **Jarad Higgins** and who was from the Chicago suburb of **Homewood**, went into convulsions during the search. One of the agents administered Narcan after the rapper's girlfriend said he had been taking Percocet, an opioid painkiller, Guglielmi said, confirming a report in the Chicago Tribune. Higgins woke up but remained incoherent, the paper reported. (AP)

**LOS ANGELES:** Pete Frates, whose personal battle with the neurodegenerative disease ALS inspired the Ice Bucket Challenge campaign that raised millions of dollars for medical research, died on Monday aged 34, seven years after his diagnosis, Boston College said.

The former BC baseball captain, who was named head of the school's baseball operations the year he became ill, died at his home in the **Boston** suburb of **Beverly, Massachusetts**, surrounded by loved ones. An all-around athlete who played football, hockey and baseball in high school before attending Boston College, Frates was diag-

## Honors

## Big Bird walks the red carpet

## Ronstadt, Field marked at Kennedy Center

By Ashraf Khalil

Actress **Sally Field**, singer **Linda Ronstadt** and the disco-funk band Earth, Wind and Fire shared the spotlight Sunday night as part of the latest group of recipients of the Kennedy Center Honors for lifetime achievement in the arts.

Also in this year's class were conductor **Michael Tilson Thomas** and long-running children's TV show "Sesame Street". Sunday's event featured a genuinely unique event for the Kennedy Center as **Big Bird** walked the red carpet along with fellow "Sesame Street" characters Bert and Ernie, Abby and Cookie Monster, accompanied by their respective humans.

The massive yellow avian's appearance held a particular resonance as **Caroll Spinney**, Big Bird's original puppeteer, died earlier Sunday at age 85.

"I'm heartbroken that this happened on this particular day," said **Sonia Manzano**, who played Maria for decades on "Sesame Street". "But I'm glad we're all together." As she entered the building, Field, who has won two Academy Awards and three Emmys, reflected on the unique nature of the Kennedy Center Honors medallion.

"It's not about one performance. It's not about being the flavor of the month," she said. "It recognizes artists whose body of work has resonated over the years." Once again, the attendance of President Donald Trump was a topic of speculation until the White House said Friday that neither he nor First Lady Melania Trump would attend. Trump skipped the past two celebrations; in 2017, multiple recipients threatened to boycott the event if he attended.

Tom Hanks, who entered the building, pointed out that this annual tension seems unique to the Trump administration.

"We've been here for Republican presidents and we've been here for

Democratic presidents," he said. "We were all celebrating the arts in America." Last year's ceremony contained very few overt political references. But this year, several signs of the country's divisive political mood bubbled to the surface. During the annual Saturday night gala dinner for honorees at the State Department, Ronstadt, a long-time liberal activist, reportedly had a testy exchange with Secretary of State **Mike Pompeo**.

Pompeo introduced Ronstadt by referencing one of her signature hits – "When Will I Be Loved" – and wondered aloud when he would be loved. Ronstadt, according to multiple attendees who posted on social media, responded, "When you stop enabling Donald Trump." On Sunday night, Kennedy Center Chairman **David Rubenstein** noted that half a dozen members of Trump's Cabinet were in attendance, and the camera focused on Pompeo to polite applause. Then he introduced House Speaker, who received a spontaneous, extended standing ovation.

## Personalized

Each recipient is honored with a personalized presentation that in the past has included surprise guests. Last year, Cher was shocked to find her friend **Cyndi Lauper** walking onstage to deliver a tribute; Lauper had told Cher she would be out of town.

**Don Henley**, who received his own Kennedy Center Honor in 2016 as a member of the Eagles, praised Ronstadt's "curiosity about multiple music styles" that led her to explore early country-rock, mainstream pop, Broadway and Mexican folk ballads.

"And Linda owned each and every genre she explored," Henley said.

**Carrie Underwood**, **Aaron Neville**, **Trisha Yearwood** and **Flor de Toloache**, an all-female mariachi band, performed. No less an authority than **Emmylou Harris** described Ronstadt's voice as "the most stunningly beauti-

ful of our generation." Ronstadt, who retired from performing in 2011 due to the effects of Parkinson's disease, wept openly in the honorees box as **Harris** spoke.

**Hanks** and **Steven Spielberg**, both previous Kennedy Center Honorees, paid tribute to Field. Hanks, who memorably played Field's son in "Forrest Gump", drew a laugh when he walked onstage by donning a familiar southern accent and drawling, "Hi Momma". **Maura Tierney** recalled working on the television show "E.R.", where Fields' played her unstable mother.

"Watching how she works had a profound effect on me as a human and as an artist," Tierney said. "Thank you for being one of the most righteous ... women I have ever had the pleasure to work with." The co-founders of "Sesame Street", **Joan Ganz Cooney** and **Lloyd Morrisett**, accepted the honor on behalf of the show, but the presentation included familiar cast members.

For starters, **Big Bird** strolled down the aisle and basically sat in **Hanks'** lap. Actor **Joseph Gordon-Levitt** had an extended chat with **Cookie Monster** and the segment ended with a mass rendition of the show's signature tune, "Sing a Song". **Tilson Thomas**, widely known simply as **MTT**, was repeatedly praised for pushing musical boundaries while serving as music director of the **San Francisco Symphony** for the past 24 years.

**Lars Ulrich**, drummer for the venerable Bay Area metal band **Metallica**, recalled working on a joint project with **Thomas'** orchestra, calling it "one of the most exhilarating and creatively rewarding experiences of my career." Actress **Debra Winger** praised **Thomas'** "contagious child-like exuberance" and willingness to forge unusual collaborations.

"Taking his friends to unusual musical places is who Michael is and what he does," Winger said. (AP)

nosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, in 2012 at the age of 27.

"Pete was an inspiration to so many people around the world who drew strength from his courage and resiliency," the Frates family said in a statement.

The Ice Bucket Challenge went viral on social media in the summer of 2014, when people around the world posted videos and photos of themselves dumping buckets of ice water on their heads and challenging others to do the same while urging donations for ALS research.

The campaign raised more than \$220 million, the ALS Association reported. In 2017, the Food and Drug Administration announced it approved a drug that slows the effects of ALS, a progressive, fatal disease that impairs nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, causing loss of muscle control. (RTRS)



U2 singer **Bono** (right), joins hands with (from left), US Ambassador to the Philippines **Sung Kim**, Philippine Red Cross Chairman and CEO **Richard Gordon** and Zipline co-founder and CEO **Keller Rinaudo** during the launching of the first blood by drone delivery service in the country at the Philippine Red Cross headquarters in suburban **Mandaluyong**, east of **Manila**, Philippines on Dec 10. Bono is in the country for a concert with his band U2 as part of their 'The Joshua Tree Tour'. (AP)

**LOS ANGELES:** Twitter released its top-trending topics and tweets of 2019 with "Game of Thrones", "Avengers: Endgame", and actor **Tom Holland** commanding the most tweets in the TV, movies, and actors categories.

BTS holds both the No. 1 spot in the most-tweeted-about musicians category and the second-most-retweeted tweet worldwide. Since its release in June, a video of BTS band member **Jungkook** dancing has been liked 2.3 million times and retweeted 951,000 times.

Fans have responded to the tweet with adoration, tweeting "I miss you", and celebrating BTS' Twitter power by acknowledging Jungkook's retweet stats.

"Game of Thrones" released its final season this year, and fans took to Twitter to express their feelings, propelling the property to the top of the TV category. Even though fans were highly critical of the season, the Television Academy bypassed criticism and awarded the series with an Emmy for best drama series. In its final year, fans continued to keep the spirit of "Game of Thrones" alive with funny and creative posts. (RTRS)